

Christian Nigerians Anticipate Terrorist Attacks

Christians in the northern states of Nigeria are expecting attacks from terror group Boko Haram on Saturday.

“There is an intentional effort by the Islamic extremist group named Boko Haram to unleash more violence against Christians in the northern provinces of Nigeria,” says Carl Moeller with Open Doors, USA. “There is a specific attack that is scheduled for July 30, and this is causing a great deal of concern on the parts of Christians throughout the country.”

The date holds special meaning to the terror group, Moeller says. “It’s the second anniversary of the death of the founder of Boko Haram, sort of an indigenous, al-Qaida-affiliated Islamic group in the northern states of Nigeria.”

Security is extremely tight in Bauchi and Maiduguri, two key centers of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. Reportedly the Bauchi branch of the Muslim group has pulled out of the plan to attack Christians and government personnel tomorrow. The situation in Maiduguri is much more dangerous, however, especially after several bomb explosions have rocked the city lately.

The government, under the leadership of Christian president Goodluck Jonathan, has brought in soldiers and increased the security significantly. But Boko Haram has not been afraid to attack government workers in the past.

The country is split roughly down the middle between Christians and Muslims in the population. Thus, many attacks have occurred in the past. Still, believers are bracing themselves for violence like never before. Frightened Christians are fleeing en masse.

In the Wulari area, only a handful of homes are still occupied, and the large Gomari district is significantly deserted. In another area of 1,000 houses, everybody left except one person.

Christian businessmen have abandoned their businesses. Churches have locked their doors. Some schools also have shut down, and those still open only run skeletal services.

Some believers are leaving to avoid getting more deeply involved. "Christians have been very concerned about being drawn into that violence through revenge and so forth. So rather than get into that sort of cycle of violence, the Christians have opted to leave—at least temporarily," explains Moeller.

Yet, even the mass exodus seems a victory for Boko Haram. "They may not kill all the Christians in a region, but if they can get them to flee, it effectively accomplishes the same goal for them," notes Moeller.

As Saturday approaches, there are real fears that Boko Haram might unleash terror on other parts of the country where there is not as much security presence as in Maiduguri and Bauchi. Places like Katsina, Suleja in Niger state, where there have been explosions in the past, may be targeted, including churches not attacked before.

With so much violence planned for tomorrow, but also for coming days, Open Doors is urging people to get on their knees and pray.

"We're joining—and encouraging people to join—with the church in Nigeria in this area to fast and pray for the next 21 days," says Moeller, "so that we can see [some peace] not only in the immediate next week of July 30, but also as the situation goes forward."